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DISCOURSE
OF
OFFENCES.

Delivered in Two SERMONS

Aug. 19. and Sept. 2. 1683.

IN THE

Cathedral Church

OF

GLOUCESTER.



*Published by reason of the Hainous Offence that was taken at the
former of these Sermons, by some of that City.*

By Edward Fowler, D. D.

*Give none Offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the
Church of God. 1 Cor. 10. 32.*

*Whoſoever ſhall be aſhamed of me, and of my words, in this Adulterous and
Sinfull Generation, of him alſo ſhall the Son of man be aſhamed, when he
cometh in the Glory of his Father, with the Holy Angels. S. Mark 8. 38.*

L O N D O N,

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484:90

TO THE
Right Reverend Father in God,
R O B E R T,
Lord Bishop of
G L O U C E S T E R.

My LORD.

LITTLE did I think, when I made these plain Sermons of Offences, that they would have made me, in any Place within His Majestie's Dominions, so High an Offender, as the former of them hath, in your City. But whether the Offence that is so strangely expressed, and without President (of which way of doing it, I thank the Observer heartily, for being the first Publisher) be Offence given or merely taken, I leave it to your Lordship to judge, when you have given your self the trouble of reading it over, together with the Second part on the same Subject. And it is the

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onely favour, I have now to beg of your Lordship, that you would give your self this little trouble. I wish your Lordship had been present at the Hearing of these Sermons, which if you had, you had heard every syllable of what I took the Freedom to deliver in your Absence.

*I doubt not, your Lordship hath had as Odious Representations made of the Sermon that occasioned the Act of Common Council, as I perceive were sent to the Observator: And, no doubt, a no whit better Character of the second had been given you (for I am sure it deserves no better) had not those that were offended, obliged themselves to be out of the Hearing of it, by that sudden Act of theirs, the very next day after the first was preach'd. I solemnly profess to your Lordship, that this whole Discourse is neither better nor worse in Print, than it was in the Preaching; Each part of it being published, without the least Addition, Diminution, or Alteration, of any thing. So that by this most fair Play, the Act-Makers have all the Advantage imaginable given them, of going a much more Terrible way to work with me, if any thing either Seditious or Factionous be to be found in either of these Sermons. And I assure your Lordship, there is as much such Stuff in these, as in any I ever preached, either in Gloucester, or else
where*

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where in my whole Life. And therefore, if your Lordship shall find me guilty of any such Crimes, I need not put you in mind that you can doe no less, than procure to the COUNTENANCER of SEDITION and FACTION, or (which is the same thing, without mincing the matter, like these modest Gentlemen.) to the Seditious and Factious Preacher, the severest Punishment that either the Laws or the Canons can inflict upon so high an Offender: That so an ORTHODOX and LOYAL Person may fill his Stall in the Quire, and take his turns in the Pulpit for the time to come: And the Innocent City may be saved Harmless from the Penalty now imposed upon them, of hiring such a Preacher. I am in great earnest, My Lord, for I had a thousand times rather fall into a Bishop's hands, than into the hands of any New Committee of Tryers.

I am sorry for the trouble that my Preaching at Gloucester hath occasioned to your Lordship, but I should have been more sorry to have prevented it, by Dawbing with untempered Morter, and being Meal-mouth'd, and partial (for fear of displeasing a very few, though never so powerfull) in exposing of that, which we are all obliged to take all opportunitie to expose. Many, I am sure, will bear me witness, that impartiality

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ality is one of the worst faults, I have ever been guilty of, in any of the Sermons that have made Men angry; but, by the grace of God, this fault I will never mend: And all that know your Lordship will easily believe, that you'll never like me one jot the worse for't. Some of the other sort of People in London, I hear took such Offence at the same Sermon, as to declare they would never hear me more. And this Fate of being Censured and Reproached by the bad or weak of all Parties, those must make full account of undergoing, who are resolved to doe the Work of their great Master with all Faithfulness. And this, by God's help, is my sincere Resolution, whatsoever it costs me; and in the doing of my duty, to have always in my Eye that advice of the Apostle, Whatsoever you doe, doe it heartily, as to the Lord and not as to men; knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the Reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. I hope you will pardon this Freedom to,

My LORD,

Your Lordship's Obedient

and Humble Servant,

Edw. Fowler.

A
DISCOURSE
OF
Offences, &c.

MATTH. 18. 7.

*Woe unto the World because of Offences; for it
must needs be that Offences come; but woe to
that man by whom the Offence cometh.*

NOT to trouble you with any thing of Preface,
we have our Saviour in these Words,

First, Asserting the *impossibility of the not Coming*
of Offences, or the *Unavoidableness* of them. And

Secondly, Pronouncing *Woes* upon the account of
them. He asserts the *Unavoidableness* of them, in these
words, *It must needs be that Offences come.* The *Woes*
he pronounceth upon the account of them are two,

First, Against the *World*, or men in general: *Woe un-*
to the World because of Offences.

Secondly, Against those *particular* persons who are

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the *Causes* of Offences: But woe to that man by whom the Offence cometh.

In the handling of this Text, I will endeavour to shew

- I. *What we are to understand here by Offences.*
- II. *From whence the Unavoidableness of them doth arise.*
- III. *That Offences are of woeful consequence, both to men in general, and to those particular persons by whom they come.*

I. *We will endeavour to shew what we are to understand by Offences in this place.* It is in the Greek, οὐαὶ τῷ κόσμῳ ἀπὸ τοῦ σκανδάλου. *Woe to the world because of Scandals.* Now the *Grammarians* tell us that this word σκανδάλον comes from σκῆζω, to *Halt*, or to be *Lame*: And its proper signification is a *Trap*, or *Snare*; and by a *Metaphor* is used in the *New Testament* to signify whatsoever administreth an occasion of falling into *sin*, or is a *temptation* thereunto. In *Rom. 14. 13.* πρὸςκομμα, a *Stumbling-block*, and σκανδάλον are put together, to express the same thing: Judge this rather, that no man put πρὸςκομμα, a *stumbling-block*, ἢ σκανδάλον, or an occasion to fall, as it is translated, in his Brother's way. And *1 Pet. 2. 8.* λίθος πρὸςκόμιμας, and πέτρα σκανδάλου, a *stone of stumbling*, and *rock of offence*, or *scandal*, are also two phrases of the same signification. And accordingly σκανδαλίζειν signifies to make ones Brother to offend, or to fall into *sin*, *1 Cor. 8. 13.* And whereas in the verse following our Text, σκανδαλίζει is translated *offend*; if thine hand or foot offend thee cut them off; by *offending* is to be understood, being an *unavoidable occasion* of Offending.

Now an *Offence* or *Scandal* is commonly distinguished into *Datum & Acceptum*, *Given* and *Taken*. An *Offence given* is, when such things are said or done as have a *natural tendency* to the drawing of men into *sin*. An *Of-*
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fence *taken*, or *taken* and not *given*, is, when words or actions that are *well intended*, and in themselves either *good* or *lawfull*, are so construed as to be made an occasion of sinning. And in *this* acceptation of the word *Offence*, the *best actions* that ever were done may *accidentally* become *Offences*, or *Scandals*; and the *best men* that have ever lived may happen to be *Offenders*, or *Scandalizers*. Our *Saviour* himself (as appears from the now cited Text) was one *from whom Offence came*, and that *mighty Offence* too; He *there* being said, *to be made a stone of stumbling, and rock of Offence, even to them which stumble at the word*. And this was predicted concerning him by Old *Simeon*, Luk. 2. 34. *This Child is set for the fall, and rising again of many in Israel*: As for the *rising* of many, so for the *fall* of many; but not *so* set for their *fall*, as for their *rising*; for he was *designedly* set for the *rising* of many, but he *accidentally* became an occasion of the *fall* of many, through the offence they causelessly took at him, upon several accounts.

Now *both* these sorts of *Offences*, *viz.* those *given* and those *onely taken*, are to be understood in *this* saying in the Text, *Woe to the world because of Offences*; and in *this* too, *for it must needs be that Offences come*. But that *Offence* *onely* which is *given*, *Scandalum datum*, is to be understood in the *last words*, *but woe to that man by whom the Offence cometh*. For no woe can justly be pronounced against *him* from whom an *Offence* cometh, upon the account thereof, if he be but a mere *accidental* cause of the *Offence*; and it be wholly the fault of the *Offended* that *Offence* is taken at him: which, as we said, was the case of our *Blessed Lord* himself. And indeed no one that ever appeared in the world was ever so great an *accidental* cause of Peoples being offended, as *He* was.

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II. I proceed to shew, *from whence the Unavoidableness of Offences doth arise.* Our Text saith, that it *must needs be that Offences come*, ἀνάγκη γὰρ ἔστιν ἔλθῃν τὰ σκάνδαλα, *there is a necessity of the coming of Offences.* And St. Luke Chap. 17. 1. doth thus exprels this Passage, *It is impossible but that Offences will come.* So that there is no preventing them, as unhappy things as in both these places we understand they are, by the *Woes* pronounced on the account of them.

But we are now to enquire, *from whence the unavoidableness of them, the necessity of their coming, the impossibility of their not coming doth proceed.*

And to *this* I answer, that it proceeds from these two causes conjunctly.

1. From the World's being so full of Folly and Wickedness, as it is; and every part thereof.

2. From God's determination for great ends not to prevent by his Omnipotency the natural effects of *these*.

1. From the world's being so full of Folly and Wickedness, as it is; and *all* parts of it. I need not go about to convince you, that the Generality of men in all places are far from being Wise; are Rash, Heady and Inconsiderative; acted by Prejudice and blind Passions: And that the number of those who are calmly and sedately considerative, in their *own* actings, and in passing judgment upon the actions of *others*, is exceeding small. And consequently, most men must needs be extremely prone to *give* Offence, and no less liable to the *taking* of Offence, when Offence is *given*, and when also it is *not* given.

Nor need I go about to convince you, that all places abound with Wickedness as well as Folly. *The whole world*, saith St. John, *lieth in wickedness.* 1 Ep. 5.

v. 19. So it was in *his* time, ~~and so~~ it hath done, ever since the first Apostasie, to *our* times. *Moses* gives a lamentable account of the Depravedness of the Old World; which provoked God Almighty to overflow it with a Deluge of Waters; *Gen. 6. 5.* There he saith that God saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the Earth, and that every imagination, and the thoughts of his heart, were onely evil continually. And *St. Paul* gives a like sad account of the New World, both Gentile and Jewish, *Rom. 3.* from the 9th verse. He there setteth forth the General fearfull depravation, both of the Gentiles and Jews, as if it were Universal. And I need not tell you that, though the business of Christ's coming into the world, was to destroy the works of the Devil; and to Redeem us from all iniquity, yet his Grace is received in vain, and turned also into wantonness, by the generality of those that profess faith in him. So that the Jews could not more vie with the Gentiles in wickedness, than the Christians may vie with both Jews and Gentiles. And, to our great grief and shame be it spoken, this may too truly be affirmed, of those that pass under the name of Protestant and Reformed, as well as of Popish Professors of Christianity. And although all Ages have not been alike wicked, nor all Countries in any Age, yet the far greater part of all Societies of men in all Ages have hitherto greatly corrupted their ways. And, which is never sufficiently to be laid to heart, this Present Age is in divers respects more debauched than many, if not than all, the foregoing: And this Nation is more so, than it hath been known to be in former times; notwithstanding the blessed means of Grace we have enjoyed, above most other People in the World; and notwithstanding too the very heavy judgments, which have come for forty years past so thick upon us.

Now

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Now then, considering the great wickedness of the world, and how full all places are of wicked men, *it must needs be that Offences come*: And 'tis impossible but that very many in all Ages and Places will be Scandalized, and fall into Sin, by the means of them. It is impossible but all places must be full of Stumbling-blocks, and 'tis impossible too but that many will fall over them, and break their Necks; as will be shewn anon. We add hereunto that,

2. *It must needs be that Offences come*, because God Almighty hath, for great Ends, determined, not to prevent these natural effects of Folly and Wickedness; not to interpose by his Omnipotency in hindring the folly and wickedness, which are in mens hearts, from being the causes of Offences. Upon which account we read in the Prophecie of *Ezekiel*, Chap. 3. 20. of God's laying a Stumbling-block *before him that turns from his righteousness and committeth iniquity*. And it is an idiom of the *Hebrew* Language, which we find often in the Holy Scriptures, to express that as *done* by another, which is onely *permitted* to be done. To give but one instance of this, *God* is said in one place, to *move David to number the People*, whereas 'tis said in another, that *Satan moved David* hereunto; so that the meaning of *God's* doing it, must be that he *permitted Satan*, for great and wise reasons, to doe it. Now,

1. One Reason wherefore God hath determined not to hinder the folly and wickedness of men from being the causes of *Offences*, is the same that is given, why there must be *Heresies*, or why he will *permit* Heresies to be. The Apostle saith, *1 Cor. 11. 19. There must be also Heresies among you, that they which are approved, may be made manifest among you*. Even so, there must be *Offences* and *Scandals*, that there may be a manifest difference and discrimination made, between the *sincere* and the

the *insincere* Professors of Religion : For *this* reason hath God determined not to restrain foolish or wicked men, from the laying of Stumbling-blocks. The cause of this Necessity is far from being his immutable Decree, that men shall doe foolish or wicked things, and so cause Scandals; God forbid we should entertain so impious a thought: But the cause thereof is the folly and wickedness of men, occasioned by the abuse of their Liberty, and God's determining not to prevent their causing Scandals; his determining *this* for *great reasons* : One of which, I say, is, that by *them* a Tryal may be made, who are Upright-hearted, and who Hypocritical, in the Profession of Religion. Who have the Power of Godliness, and who the External Form onely. That a difference may be made, between those *Wise* Builders, who have founded their houses upon a *Rock*, and those *Foolish* ones, who have built them upon the *Sand* : Between those who have embraced Religion for its *own* sake, and those who have embraced it for the sake of their Temporal *interest* ; and are engaged in the ways thereof, from corrupt Motives and carnal Principles.

Thus did God Almighty permit False Prophets to work wonders by the Power of the Devil, to draw the People to Idolatry, in order to the making of *this* discrimination ; as may be seen *Deut. 13. 1, 2, 3.* *If there arise among you a Prophet, or a Dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a Sign or a Wonder, and the Sign or the Wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other Gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them : Thou shalt not hearken unto the voice of that Prophet, or that Dreamer of dreams : For the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul.* That is, the Lord your God permitteth this stone of stumbling to be laid in your way, that it may be as it were, a
Touch-

Touch-stone, for the Tryal of your love to him; that a discrimination may be hereby made, between those who *sincerely* love him, and those who only *pretend* to love him.

For the same reason likewise, did not God restrain *Jeroboam, Ahab*, or the other wicked Kings, *Who made Israel to sin*, from laying before their People the great Offences and Scandals of the Golden Calves, &c. and temptations to Idolatry by their Precepts and Examples: And by this means, an apparent difference was *actually* made, between those who were onely *Jews outwardly*, and those who were *Jews inwardly*. By this means were those seven thousand, who hated Idolatry, distinguished from the rest of the People. *I have*, saith God by the Prophet, *reserved unto me seven thousand, who have not bowed the knee to Baal.*

2. Another Reason, why God hath determined the not restraining of men from giving *Offence*, or being the Causes of Scandals, is, that by *them* the Obdurate may, in his just judgment, be more hardned. For instance, He permitted *Simon Magus* and his Followers, to be the Authors of such mighty Scandals, for *this* reason; as we reade *1 Thess. 2. 11*, *For this cause God shall send them strong delusions* (or shall permit them to be sent) *that they may believe a lie* (or that the hypocritical Professors of Christianity may believe a lie) *that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

And we may be assured, that for *both* the Reasons now given, God hath permitted the *Roman Hierarchy* to bring so horrible a Scandal upon the Christian Religion, for so many Ages past; by debauching it with such corrupt and damnable Principles and Practices, *viz.*

1. To make a difference between the Sincere Christians, and Hypocrites; which, I need not tell you, hath
by

by this means been made, in innumerable instances : Many thousands having chosen the loss of *all*, and even the most Cruel *deaths*, rather than to embrace those Principles, and comply with those Practices ; and rather than not to *Protest* against both. And,

2. In his just judgment to harden *such* more in their wickedness, as *turn the grace of God into lasciviousness*. For 'tis well known, nothing is better known than, that the whole Systeme of Popery is so contrived, as to reconcile *light with darkness*, the *thickest* darkness with the most *glorious* light ; gross *Idolatry* of several kinds (such *Idolatry* as that grosser is not to be found among the Pagans) *unfatiabable Covetousness* and *Ambition*, and monstrous *Cruelty*, with true *Christianity* ; and a careless and dissolute life in *this* world, with the hopes of Happiness in the *other*.

And for both these reasons hath God, we may be sure, permitted also fearfull *Offences* and Scandals to come by *Protestants* ; by those who make a *Profession* of this our holy Religion (of *true* and *genuine* Christianity, purged from all Popish mixtures) which unto all sincere and pious Protestants, are matter of most bitter Lamentation : Particularly the *Drunkenness*, *Uncleaness* and *Profaneness* of Multitudes that profess the Reformed Religion, and the Scandal of *Rebellion* and *Treasonable Conspiracies* , that some of them have incurred the guilt of ; and *that* in *this* Kingdome , now very *lately*.

Though all good Protestants do bleſs God heartily, for the Discovery of such Conspiracies, and for the Defeating of open Resistences of the Higher Powers, and secret Plots against them ; yet 'tis a heart-breaking Consideration to *such* , that there should be such Antichristian doings found among us ; by which a woefull Blot is cast upon our Religion, and particularly by this

Last wicked Conspiracy of some Mad Desperate People, who call themselves Protestants.

Now, I say, for *both* the forementioned reasons, we may be assured God Almighty hath permitted such fearfull Offences and Scandals, to come by professed Protestants, Viz.

1. To make a discrimination between those who are well Grounded in our Religion, and those that are not so. Those who are well Grounded in our Religion, and embrace it like Wise and Understanding men, viz. because of the excellency of its Principles, will not be tempted to think one jot the worse of it, in regard of these Offences. Such will consider that if *these* can make a reasonable objection against the truth of the Protestant Religion, the *same* objection lies every whit as strong, against the truth of Christianity: For even in the *First* and *Purest* Ages of Christianity, there were as wicked people found among the Professors of it, and men that did as wicked things, as ever were before or since to be found in the World. Such will consider too, that the Protestant Religion is no more to be charged with Rebellions, or any other Licentious Principles, than is Christianity: For *this* Religion is nothing else but Pure and Uncorrupted Christianity. Nay they will consider, that Rebellion and Treason, and whatsoever hath any tendency that way, and all kinds of immorality whatsoever, are expressly forbidden by our Religion, under pain of Damnation. They being so forbidden, as by the Precepts of the Gospel, and the Doctrine of all the Reformed Churches, so especially by the Doctrine of the Church of England, as by Law established, derived from the Gospel. And therefore *these* Offences are no objection to Understanding and well Grounded Protestants, against the truth of their Religion; whilst those that have embraced it onely because it is the Religion

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ligion of their *Country*, or on such like weak and slight Grounds, do often find *this* Objection too strong for them; and it frequently occasions *their* Apostasie. And then especially are such in danger of Apostatizing, by means of this Scandal of *Treasons* and *Rebellions* particularly (as often as these sins are found among Protestants) when the Adversaries of our Religion do assault them with the Sophistical Argument drawn from this Scandal, with all the Advantage of *their* Sophistry.

Obj. But you may say, If the *Popish* Treasons and Conspiracies are used by *us*, as an Argument against *that* Religion; why should not the *Papists* make use of the Treasons and Conspiracies of *Protestants*, as an Argument against *our* Religion? This seems to be Fair Play.

Sol. I answer, that *Popish* Treasons and Conspiracies may *not* be used by *us*, as an Argument against the *Popish* Religion (nor are they so used by any wise man, that I know of) because, for the reason already given, this is a *fallacious* Argument. But *our* Argument against *them* is, that their Treasons and Conspiracies are suitable and agreeable to the allowed *Principles* of Popery; provided at least, that they be levelled against Heretical Princes. And if *those* committed among *us* can be shewed to be suited to the *Protestant* Principles, and by *them* encouraged, then will not I, for *my* part, ever more open my mouth for the Protestant Religion. But *this* can *never* be shewed, but the perfectly *contrary* who cannot shew? And as for the Principles that some Protestants have imbibed, they are not *Protestants* in imbibing them, nay they are *Papists* in so doing: For 'tis very well known, they at least *Originally* received them from *their* Books: Particularly from the Books (as I can shew) of these Jesuits, *Snarez*, *Lessius*, *Mariana*, Father *Parsons*, with divers others.

Again Secondly, God also permits these grievous Offences to come by Protestants (as for the making the forementioned discrimination between Protestants and Protestants, so) for the farther hardening, in his just judgment, of wicked people: For the farther hardening of irreligious people against *all* Religion, and of obstinate Papists against *our* Religion. In *Rom. 2. 21, 22, &c.* the Apostle saith, *Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thy self? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? thou that sayest a man should not commit Adultery, dost thou commit Adultery? thou that abhorrest Idols, dost thou commit Sacrilege? thou that makest thy boast of the Law, through breaking the Law, dishonourest thou God? then it follows, For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles, through you.*

To keep to the instances of *Rebellion* and *Treason*, the Papists, when they see such doings among Protestants, (willingly overlooking the innumerable instances of this nature which *themselves* are so infamous for throughout the world: And seeming not to know what *Principles* they have to encourage them in such Practices) they immediately cry out, *These are your Protestants, and this is their Religion; 'tis good for nothing but to make men Rebels and Traytors. Princes can have no security from these Protestants.* And they urge the same Argument for the utter destruction of the Protestant Religion, that was used by *Bishlam*, and his Company, to King *Artaxerxes*, against the Rebuilding of *Jerusalem*, viz. *This City is a Rebellious City, and hurtfull unto Kings and Provinces.* And, no doubt of it, our Adversaries will not be wanting in improving *this* Argument to the utmost, at *this* time: Though there are no sort of men in the world, but might with a *better* face doe it. And so, by this means, they more harden *themselves* (if they can be *more* hardened) in their Enmity to *our* Religion,
and

and more harden *others*. And, as I said, for *this* reason, no doubt, God permitteth in his just judgment, *this* sort of Offences, as well as *others*, to come by Protestants. I mean still, by *Professors* of the Protestant Religion; for the Authors of such Offences cannot be more than in *Profession* Protestants: Nay, considered as guilty of such Offences, they are truly *Papists*; so far *forth* they deserve that name.

I may apply to this discourse, those words of our Saviour, *John* 9. 39. *For judgment am I come into this world, that they which see not, might see, and that they which see might be made blind.* That those which sit in darkness, may have the light; and that those who have the light, but wilfully shut their eyes against it (as one would think those *Papists* do who live among *us*) and will not be convinced by the strongest and most powerfull Arguments, *may be made blind.* And Offences, or Scandals, are great instruments in the hand of the Divine Justice, for *this* purpose.

III. I come to shew that *Offences are of woefull consequence.* We learn from our Text, that they are so to the *world*, or to men in *general*; *Woe unto the world because of Offences:* And likewise, to those *particular* persons, *by whom they come*; *but woe to that man by whom the Offence cometh.* Now,

First, As to their being of woefull consequence to the *world*, or to the *generality* of men. It hath been intimated already, that such is the *Folly* and *Wickedness* of the *Generality*, that when these Snares are laid before them, they occasion their *falling into Sin*; and also Multitudes in all places are mightily *hardened* in sin, by the means of them.

1. They

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1. They occasion their *falling into sin*, to the great endangering of their Souls; and, as we see very ordinarily, to the ruining of themselves and their Families, as to all the concerns of *this* world. Wicked men are the most Pernicious instruments, the Devil can make use of, in the carrying on his great work, of drawing men into *Sin*, and, by that means, into *Misery* both here and hereafter, both temporal and eternal. As *they are of their Father the Devil*, so *his works they doe*, as our Lord said of the *Pharisees*; they doe *this* work which is most properly and peculiarly the work of the Devil, with strange success. And *then* do offences prove the most fatal stumbling-blocks, when those by whom they come are men in circumstances to work forceably upon the *hopes* and *fears* of others: Or when they are such as have laid great *Obligations* on those whom they tempt to evil. To be under a great Obligation to a wicked man is a mighty Snare. The Principle of Ingenuity, as excellent a Principle as it is, doth too frequently, in *this* circumstance, prove infinitely mischievous. A great Benefactor is with the greatest difficulty in the world denied any thing he will demand, by a good natured man; by a man that hath much of Gratitude in his temper, and a quick sense of kindnesses: And this man offers great violence to himself, whensoever he refuseth to doe that which his Benefactor putteth him upon, or which he knoweth will please him.

Again *then* are *Offences* very fatal stumbling-blocks, when those by whom they come, are in great repute for *Wisdom*. Men are apt to give up themselves to be led blindfold by those whom they take to be mighty Wise. But of *more* force are those *Offences* to draw men into Sin, which come by *Sly Hypocrites*, who have deceived people into a wonderfull opinion of their Godliness. Now by such means, and upon such accounts as
these

these (to which may be added divers others) we find by woefull experience, that but few comparatively, when the Snares of *Offences* are laid before them, are so happy as to *escape* the danger of them.

2. Multitudes also in all places are grievously *Hardened* in sin, by the means of *Offences*; as when they come by *great Professors of Religion* especially. Ignorant people, and such as have little *kindness* for Religion, be they never so *knowing*, are too apt to conclude from thence, that either Religion is a mere *Cheat*, and hath nothing of *reality* in it; or, if it hath, that it may admit of certain *evil practices*, in order to certain *good ends*: Or that the miscarriages they behold in those Religious men, are such as a man may be guilty of, and yet be *truly* Religious: and that they are but the *Spots of God's Children*: All which Conclusions, though they be not errors of a *like hainous nature*, yet are of much a *like dangerous consequence*. And though it cannot but be observed, that there are many noted Professors of Religion that live Extraordinarily good lives; yet men that have no mind to be good, and that encourage themselves, as much as they can, to live wickedly, will not infer from hence, that these do excell the *Scandalous Professors* in real Goodness, but rather in *Slyness*. They will perswade themselves, to conclude nothing more from hence, than that these have a better faculty at *biding* their sins from the Eye of the World. And they hope that many of *these* in due time, may make their vicious inclinations as publick as *others* have done. And thus, I say, are wicked men rendered more *Obdurate*, are more *hardened* in their sins, by the means of *Offences*; and by the *Offences* especially of those who have been noted *Professors of Religion*. The horrible *Offence* that David was guilty of, in those two fearfull Sins, caused (as Nathan told him) *the Enemies of the Lord to blaspheme*; and so greatly

greatly *hardned* them in their Irreligion. For which reason, though *David* was so forgiven upon his true Repentance, as not to be punished for them in the World to come, yet he paid most dearly for them in *this* World.

Secondly, I now come to the Woefull Consequence that Offences are of to those *Particular* persons *by whom they come*. But woe to the man *by whom the Offence cometh*.

That the case of such is most deplorable, will be seen by what our Saviour saith, immediately before the words of my Text, *viz. But who so shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a Millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the Sea.* And St. Mark relateth the same words, *Chap. 9. 42.* and so doth St. Luke too, *Chap. 17. 2.* that the greater regard may be given unto them. And *this* is the meaning of these words: He that shall either by words, or deeds, discourage the very *meanest* of Christ's Disciples, from holding on in his Christian Practice; shall cause him to fall into Sin; it will be better for him to have a great heavy weight hanged about his neck, and to be therewith cast into the Sea; whereby he will be hurried to the bottom of it, and never suffered to rise again. What an Emphatical expression is *this*, of the most woefull state, which that Person is in by whose means *Offences*, or Scandals, come! And mark, the Condition of *that* man is declared to be thus dreadfull, who hath caused to offend any *one*, and that of the *meanest* and *weakest* of those *that believe in Christ*. How unexpressibly sad and dismal *then*, shall his Punishment be, who in this sense hath *Offended many*! I mean upon supposition, he prevents it not, by timely Repentance and Reformation.

And

And what reason have those of us, who are in a *Publick Station*, whether *Magistrates* or *Ministers*, to consider *this* well, and lay it to heart, and to have an *Extraordinary* care of *our* lives! For *our* Example will have a *much larger* influence on *others*, than the Example of *Private* Persons: And if by any Evil Practice or Advice, we cause *any* to offend, we are like to cause *many* to offend. And, consequently, how extremely miserable must *our* Condition then necessarily be in the World to come!

I will conclude the Doctrinal part with *those* words, Deut. 27. 18. *Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way* (or that *shall put a stumbling-block before the blind*, contrary to the Law of God. Lev. 19. 14.) *and all the people shall say Amen.*

I now come to make *Application* of what hath been discoursed, and our Application shall be *this*.

How Infinitely are we all concerned, as we would not have the *Woe* pronounced against those *by whom Offences come*, for *our* Portion, to look to it that we be not found of that number! And if at present any of us *are*, to Repent immediately, to bewail in the bitterness of our Spirits our having caused Offences, and to doe all that lies in our power, for the time to come, not onely *to give no Offence in any thing* (according to St. Paul's advice 2 Cor. 6. 3.) but also to *Repair* the injury we have done to *Religion*, and to the *Souls* of men, by whatsoever Offences we have occasioned. And that we may so doe, it will be necessary to consider the *Several Ways* whereby Offence may be taken, that so we may avoid it in those instances: And if we are Conscious to our selves of having been guilty in any of them, we may Repent and Reform for the Future.

Here begins the second Sermon.

I. One way of Offending is the Drawing of our Brethren into Erroneous Opinions. I mean *such* as have an ill influence upon mens Lives and Natures. I don't mean *such* as are merely *not true*; for, there being divers points relating to Religion so disputable, as that no man can certainly tell, whether he be not mistaken in them: if I should make *him* guilty of this sin of *Offending*, who happens to lead his Brother into any false Notion, I should be forced to assert, that a man may be guilty of *giving Offence*, and not be able to know he is so. But it is not to be imagined, that a Sin which hath so great a Woe attending it as *this* in the Text, can possibly be a Sin of Unavoidable infirmity, or invincible Ignorance. So that I say, by Erroneous Opinions I mean, *such* as are apt in their own nature to lead men into Sin; to make men irreligious, or to encourage to any *particular* Sin, or to the neglect of any necessary Duty. And all *such* we are certain are erroneous, and contrary to the true sense and meaning of God's word, *because* they have *such* a tendency. I will give a few *instances* of *such* false and corrupt Principles, *viz.* *That God is the Author of Sin, That he not onely foreknows all the sins of men but hath also decreed them:* Which in other words is the same with the former. *That all mens Fates are determined absolutely:* that is, without respect to their future obedience or disobedience. *That 'tis lawfull to doe evil that good may come. That Good works are not necessary to Salvation. That the Covenant of Grace is Unconditional. That Religion is a mere passive thing; not our work at all, but wholly God's in us. That mere Attrition (or Sorrow for sin for fear of Hell) is able to bring a Sinner to justification, if accompanied with the Sacrament*
of

of Penance. Which is a Doctrine plainly delivered in the Council of Trent. Sess. 4. cap. 4.

All *these*, to which I might add abundance more of like nature, wherewith mens minds have been corrupted, do manifestly encourage to a careless, loose and irreligious Life.

And to *these* I might add instances of such Principles as encourage to certain *particular* Sins, of Commission and Omission. In the number of which are all those *Popish* ones, that lead to *Idolatry* of divers kinds; that encourage *Rebellion*, and *Treasonable practices*, with which *latter* too many corrupt and spurious Protestants have declared themselves to be infected, to the great scandal of our holy Religion; as hath *already* been observed. Who, while they profess to abhor *Popery*, have been found to be the genuine Off-spring of the *Jesuite*. See Dr. Hicks his Spirit of Popery, &c.

Of *this* Rank are also those Doctrines, both *Popish* and *Fanatical*, that tend to make men *Fierce* and *Bitter*, *Proud* and *Selfish*; that destroy Charity, and spoil mens tempers.

Now those that propagate any such Principles, as either *directly*, or by *manifest* and *plain consequence*, tend to make the Embracers of them irreligious, or that encourage to any *particular* sins, are great Offenders of their Brethren: Nor are there any *greater* destroyers of Souls than Corrupters and Debauchers of mens *Understandings*; nor any *so* great. The Apostle St. Paul charged *Timothy* to beware of being found in the number of *these*, 2 Ep. 2. ch. 15, 16, 17. *Study to shew thy self approved unto God, a Workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun prophane and vain babblings* (the wretched Doctrines of Seducers) *for they will encrease unto more ungodliness* (or greatly encourage wickedness.) *And their words will eat as doth a*

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Canker, of whom is Hymeneus and Philetus, who concerning the truth have erred, saying, that the Resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. And whosoever they be, that are guilty of this kind of Offences; that are guilty of causing men to sin by corrupting their judgments, may (till they become true Penitents) look upon themselves as greatly concerned in those words of our Saviour, Matt. 5. 19. Whosoever shall break one of these least Commandments, and shall teach men so (shall teach men to evacuate and destroy the force of any one Commandment of the Moral Law) he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. Or, as Dr. Hammond interprets it, He shall be thought unworthy of having his name written, in the Catalogue of Christians here, or of Saints hereafter.

But before I conclude the Argument I am now upon, I think my self obliged to add, that I would not for a World, have had a hand in possessing mens minds with those Principles, which have administred to our Lamentable and most Unchristian *Divisions*; and, while they are entertained, will make all endeavours for the Healing of them ineffectual: viz. such as these, That *National Churches are no Churches of Christ. That the Government of the Church by Bishops is Antichristian. That Liturgies, or Set Forms of Prayer, are a Stinting of the Spirit; and therefore 'tis unlawfull to join in them. That nothing is to be done in the Worship of God, but what is expressly commanded. That indifferent things, when they come once to be Commanded, become sinfull; and the Commanding of them is a violation of our Christian Liberty. That Infant Baptism is no Baptism; and consequently those that have no other, are no Church Members; and therefore not to be Communicated withall. That it is Lawfull and a Duty to Separate from a Church, upon the account of Promiscuous Congregations, and Mixt Communions.*

nions. That there is no such tie between Ministers and their People, but that the People may cast them off, whenever they think they can Edifie more by any other: And are obliged to betake themselves to those by whom they think they can most Edifie. That an inward Call (that is, a strong impulse of Phancy) is a sufficient warrant to any man, to be a Publique Preacher. I say I, would not for a World, have had a hand in the Propagating of these, and many the like Notions, which of late years have strangely prevailed among us: For, as they have no warrant or Countenance from Scripture, so have they been woefully mischievous to the Church of God, and to this our Church. They are good for nothing, but to cause Schisms and Factions; but to destroy all good Order, and bring in Confusion; as we too well know by sad Experience. And by this means, they have done our Common Adversary mighty Service, and the Souls of men infinite prejudice. And I earnestly desire, that those who are, or have been, promoters of such Principles, may be before it be too late convinced, how greatly they are involved in the guilt of Offending; or making people to Offend: Of making them strangely Censorious and Uncharitable, mighty Unmanageable and Ungovernable, extremely Conceited, Vain and Wanton, and most Unfixed and Unsettled: Innumerable of those who have entertained such Principles, having been known to run from one Sect to another, till they have at last settled in Quakerism, or turned mere Scepticks, or cast off all Religion: Have been tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness of those, that lie in wait to deceive.

I pray take notice that what I have now said, hath not proceeded from the least pique at Persons, but from pure good-will to those who are herein concerned: From
 hearty

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heartly love and charity to their Souls, and a solicitous concern for the interest of our Religion, and the welfare of the *Publique*. And having solemnly declared *this*, I hope I shall not need to use St. Paul's Expostulation, *Am I therefore become your Enemy, because I tell you the truth?*

II. Another way of *Offending*, or making people to Offend, is inticing them to Sin by wicked *Advice* and *Solicitations*; which is an horribly bad way *indeed*: But, as bad as it is, it is very *common*. Particularly, as to *intemperate Drinking*, how common is it grown in this most dissolute Age, not onely to *intice*, but even to *force* men to *this* Sin! notwithstanding the *woe* that is pronounced against him *who giveth his Neighbour drink, and putteth his Bottle to him, and maketh him drunk, &c. Hab. 2. 15.* And there is a fine device of Good-Fellows, to force down Drink *Civilly* and *Gently*, namely, *that* of multiplying *Healths*; which not to pledge, or to refuse to pledge them in *full* Glasses, and those *large* ones too, is to be mighty Rude, and at *least* deserves a *Challenge*. But I will trouble my self no longer with these wicked men, than while I conjure you to fly their Company, and all their Haunts, as you would do the Dens of the most Salvage Beasts.

I might add, to this sin of inticing to *Drunkenness*, *that* of inticing to *Uncleanness*, and several other sorts of Wickedness, not *much less* Common: Particularly (to name no more) to *Plots* and *Conspiracies* against the King and his Government; which, of late years, to our Amazement have been practised, by *more* among us, than have been known to adventure upon so fearfull a sin, in some whole Ages heretofore.

Now these Tempters of others to Wickedness, are Daring Sinners *indeed*, *Who*, as the Apostle saith,
Rom. 1.

Rom. 1. 32. knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not onely doe the same, but have pleasure in them that doe them : Which Pleasure excites them to doe their utmost, to make others as wicked as themselves.

What name shall I give to these Sinners? They deserve no better, than that of Devils in Humane Bodies. These one would think, are affraid of being damned with too little Company; and they are not content to be damned for their own sins onely, but must have their Reckoning inhaunced by the Sins of others, which they make their own. And therefore they seem not to be satisfied with the same damnation for kind, with that of the Devils, without the same damnation for degree too.

III. Another way of Offending, and laying Stumbling-blocks before others, is that of Affrighting or Discouraging others, from being Religious, or from the doing of their duty in particular instances.

1. The highest Offence of this kind is that of Persecution, for Righteousness sake: Which is a great Offence and Scandal, to those that are actually persecuted, or in danger of Persecution. And Persecution for Well-doing is such a Stumbling-block as hath occasioned the Falling away of Multitudes of Professors of Religion. And 'tis a thousand to one that he who is not well confirmed in his Religion, or, if he be, is not a Conscientious Practicer of the duties thereof, will not stand his ground; especially when he meets with, or finds himself in danger of, the Sharpest sort of Persecutions: When he meets with a Fiery Tryal or is in danger of it. See what our Lord saith of the Stony ground Hearers, *Matt. 4. 17. These are they which are sown on stony ground, who when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time:*
After-

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Afterwards, when Affliction or Persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended: or fall away. And the danger Christ's Disciples are in, of falling off from him, when they cannot adhere to him, but they must suffer Persecution, is intimated in those words *Matt. II. 6. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

I need not tell you that the Church of Rome is horribly guilty of this kind of Offence; but so is not our own Church, God be thanked. Her terms of Communion being none of them such, as contradict any Law of God; as abundance of the Best of people are verily persuaded: And not a few of our Divines, and other Learned men, have with great, and, I think, irresistible strength demonstrated.

2. Another Offence of this nature is Representing the ways of Religion as very Rugged and Difficult, and the duties thereof as over Harsh and Severe; and at least next to impossible. Representing the Yoke of Christ as an Uneasie Yoke; and his Burthen as an intolerably heavy Burthen. This hath ordinarily been the Practice of Sensual People, of people who are wedded to their Lusts and Vile Affections. And by this means, I fear, not a few poor Souls have been utterly ruined, who have given more credit to these Wretched People, than to their Saviour, or to those Good men who assure them, that such Representations are most false and unworthy, from their own Experience.

3. Another Offence under this Head is, that which was charged by our Blessed Saviour upon the Pharisees, viz. Binding of Heavy Burthens; and Teaching for Doctrines the Commandments of Men: Or, making a great number of Additions of their own to the Laws of God; and imposing them as necessary to Salvation. And so making Religion to be indeed a mighty burthen some and uneasie thing.

And

And of *this* Offence the Church of *Rome* is more notoriously guilty, than were those *Pharisees*.

But I must again doe that right to our *own* Church, as to pronounce Her *Guiltless*, as to *this* Offence also : She having not made any thing a *Part* of Religion, but what is plainly contained in the Holy Scriptures ; nor enjoyned any thing of her *own* as *necessary to Salvation* ; but onely in order to the more Solemn Administration of Divine Worship, according to *general* Rules laid down in Scripture : Which hath not determined, as all sober men will grant, the *particular* circumstances of Worship, but prescribed Rules in *general*, whereby the Governours of Churches may determine them.

4. Another Offence, under this *third* Head, is Treating of those who have fallen into Errours of Judgment or Practice, with too great *Harshness* and *Severity*. I mean, continually inveighing against them, with mighty Heat and Fierceness ; and taking all Opportunities to expose them, and to make them the Objects of Hatred, or of Contempt and Scorn.

It is found by Experience, that *this* is so far from being the way, to convince men of their Mistakes, and to bring them to Repentance for their Miscarriages, that it stops their Ears against our Arguments, and fills them with Prejudice against our Admonitions ; and whatsoever endeavours we use, for the Reclaiming of them. We must first satisfy Offenders that we are their Friends, before we can hope to work any good upon them. But *this* kind of Behaviour is never like to convince them, that we love them. I am sure *this* is not to follow St. Paul's Admonition, 2 *Tim.* 2. 24, 25. *The Servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men ; apt to teach, patient : In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves ; if God peradventure will give them Repentance, to the acknowledging of the truth.* Dr. Hammond's

Paraphrase upon these words, *in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, is this; Dealing with those who are of different Opinions from us, with great temper and calmness, though in opposing us they oppose the truth.* Nor again, is this angry passionate way of dealing with such Persons, to follow the counsel of the same Apostle, *Gal. 6. 1. Brethren if any man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the Spirit of Meekness; considering thy self lest thou also be tempted:* Considering that thou art no less liable both to Errours of Judgment and Practice, than is thy Brother; and art not kept by thine own strength, from falling into his Errours.

A Complaint brought to me in my own Parish, where I first Preached this Sermon, occasioned that which follows.

And let me take this Opportunity to mind you likewise, that it is yet more Unchristian, to be severe upon those whom we perceive to be sensible of their having been in an Errour, and are returned or returning to their duty; to be still upbraiding these with what is past; and to load them with heavy Censures, as if the change that is observed in them hath proceeded, *not* from any good Principle, *not* from Conviction of judgment, but from the mere Fear of the lash of the Law. But how contrary are these Doings to that Charity, which the Apostle tells us, *Hope all things, and Believe all things;* and makes the best Interpretations and Constructions! And this Behaviour towards such is mightily discouraging, and therefore a great Offence, Scandal and Stumbling-block, both to them, and to those who still persist in their Errours. The Former, by this means, are shrewdly tempted to repent of their change, and to go back again: And the Latter to take warning by their Usage, and are in danger of being made more Obstinate, and confirmed in their resolution to stand their ground, and to keep where they are.

Now

Now I intreat such as are guilty of *this* Offence to consider,

1. That it is a great Rashness, and a great Wickedness too, *thus* to judge of Peoples hearts. What is *this* but to assume to *our selves* the peculiar Prerogative of God Almighty ?

2. Consider that the *Execution of the Laws* may be the *occasion* of fallen persons rising again, and returning to their duty, and yet notwithstanding they may *so doe* from the Conviction of their Judgments. That is, the *Execution of the Laws* may awaken those to more serious and impartial consideration, which by *other* means could not be brought to it ; and who can say of such as are now reduced, either *wholly* or in *part*, that this is not *their* case ?

3. If we could certainly know that *such* or *such* are reduced by mere *bye* respects ; that no *inward* change is wrought in them, but that they are onely become *externally* conformable ; yet *such* a treating of them as I am now blaming, would be a *mighty* fault for all that. For in due time these *insincere* Converts may become as *sincerely* affected towards our National Establishment, as the *best* of *our selves*, if they be but *well* dealt with : But if they find us an *ill natured* sort of People, given to Upbraiding and Censuring, Gibing and Flouting, we shall tempt them, while they continue *with* us, to resolve never to be *of* us ; and still to hold up an Aversion to our *Church*, for *our* sakes. But this is no very comfortable Consideration ; for 'tis not impossible that *False Friends* may *again* become more mischievous to our Church, than *Professed Enemies*. And *this* leads me to entreat you to Consider,

4. That an unkind treating of *those* who *now* come over to our Communion, is a plain demonstration, that we have as little *true* love for our *Church*, as we have

for the *Souls* of those we thus discourage. You shall not find an *Heartly Papist*, I'll warrant you, bestowing an *unpleasing word*, or a *sour look*, upon any that go over from *us* to *their Church*; but he immediately embraceth them with *both* his Arms, and bids them Wellcome: Nor, surely, can any *sincere* Lovers of *our Church* and Religion, be so much mistaken in their true interest, as to discourage any from *Returning*, that have *Departed* from our Communion, or from *Continuing* therein, that are *Returned*.

Lastly, To give these discouragements, is to put an Effectual Affront upon our *Governours*. For those that doe so, do as good as plainly tell the World, that they look upon their Design in the Execution of the Laws, to be mere *Revenge*, and not the *Reformation of Offenders*. Or if they would be thought not to have such a base opinion of their Governours, they must acknowledge that they doe what they can, to render their *true* Design therein Unsuccessfull. But I know not *which* of these is the *greater* Affront to them. And therefore I hope, that all who hear me this day, will carefully avoid this very scandalous practice of *some* People; as they would approve themselves *Good Churchmen*, and *truly Loyal Subjects*; and, much more, as they would approve themselves *Good Christians*, who dread to fall under the Sad *Woe* pronounced in my Text, against those by *whom Offences come*.

IV. Another way of *Offending* is by an evil *Example*. This is the *last* I shall name, as wanting time to discourse of divers others, with which I might present you. Evil *Examples* are extremely Scandalous and *Offensive*, by the means of the great inclination of Mankind to *Imitation*. 'Tis a known saying, *Plus docent Exempla quam Præcepta*, The most powerfull way of teach-
ing

ing is by Examples, and these signifie more than Precepts. There is no small force in good Examples, but much greater in bad, by reason of the Universal depravation of Humane Nature. And let a man Prescribe to others never so Excellent Rules of Life, if he himself be observed not to walk by those Rules, he had e'en as good hold his peace, for any good he is like to doe. This man's Example is a Confutation of his Doctrine and Advice; and he ought to expect no other Reply to it but this, *Cur verba audio, cum facta videam*, What regard is to be had to thy Words, when they are so contradicted by thy Practice? And, above all, the bad Examples of Magistrates and Ministers, Parents and Masters of Families, and Instructors of Youth, and of People that are noted for Wisdom, or for the Profession of Religion (as hath already been shewed) have the most Malign and Fatal Influence.

I will single the bad Example of Parents out of all these. It is a plain case, that the Wickedness of the World is mostly owing to the Examples of Drunkenness, Swearing, Profanation of the Lord's day, and of a Careless and Irreligious life, that are given by Parents to their Children. And 'tis very rare when Parents are bad, but their Children take after them; and imitate them especially in those Vices, which they observe them to be most addicted to. By which means, by that time they are grown up to years of Discretion, they are so habituated to Sinning, that though they afterwards should be so happy, as to light into the Families of Pious people, and so want neither good Advice, nor good Examples, they are found to be generally Unreclaimable: And so, when these too come to have Children, their Example proves likewise as Pernicious to them; and by this means Wickedness is still Propagated and Encreased, from Generation to Generation.

But

But let all *such* Parents know that, as none are more concerned than themselves, in the fearfull *Woe* pronounced in my Text, against those *by whom Offences come*, so may they expect the bitter *Curses* of their dear *Children*, sooner or later in *this* World, but especially in that *to come*.

This was the Sacrament-day.

I shall conclude all with a few words relating to the Sacrament of the *Lord's Supper*. This being an Ordinance most *plainly*, and in most *express* terms, instituted by our Blessed Lord, it must needs be a great *Offence* and Scandal, in those that Profess the Religion of our Saviour, to live in the *constant* neglect of it. And by the same reason that any man doeth *this*, he may cast off, with the mad *Ranters*, all *other* Ordinances. And I must add, that to come to the Lord's Table, but *once* or *twice* in a *Year*, or very *seldom*, is a great *Offence* and Scandal too. And a man may every whit as well, but *seldom* attend upon the *other* Ordinances, as omit, without apparent necessity, the Receiving of the *Lord's Supper*, *whenever* he is presented with an *Opportunity*, and is *invited* thereunto. If *Communicating* be a Duty, *Frequent* Communicating is so too; and there is the *same* reason for doing it as often, as *well* we can, that there is why we should do it *at all*. The *First* Christians were very *sensible* of *this*, and therefore 'twas their practice to Receive the *Holy Communion*, *whenever* they met to Worship God. And he that shall think that *once* in a *Month* is too often to perform this Duty, *whenever* he is persuaded to do it, I think it no breach of Charity to say, he is far from being *duly* Qualified for it. An Affecting Sense of the Infinite Love of God in Christ, and Holy Resolutions to Walk, by the assistance of his Grace, *Worthy* of that Love, are *necessary* Qualifications for this Ordinance: But how is it

it possible, that *he* who hath *this Sense*, and *these Resolutions*, can think he can too often *Express* this *Sense* at the Lord's Table, or *there* get these *Resolutions* more and more *Confirmed*, where Grace is received for that purpose, by all those that seriously, and with a sincere Design, come unto it?

But whereas there are those very Honest People, who are neither wanting in good Resolutions, nor in good Endeavours, that are discouraged from coming to the Lord's Table, as often as they would; because they find, to their grief, *their Thoughts much disordered oftentimes, and ther Affections dull and heavy; and their Power falling mightily short of their Will and Desires*, I will leave with *them* what is said to the Christian that makes these Complaints, in the *Meditation before the Sacrament*, in the * *Christian Sacrifice*, viz.

* For the Month of August.

Be assured that Christ pitieth thee, that, notwithstanding this, he will kindly entertain thee; and receive the poorest Oblation thou art able to make him at his Table. Eat and be satisfied and Bless the name of the Lord. He hath invited thee, He expects thee; He loves to see thee there; and will make thee know that he loves thee, and delights to doe thee good.

Now the God of all Mercy give us all his Grace, so to demean our Selves in all our Relations, as that no damage may accrue to the Souls of any, by our means; nor any Dishonour to our Holy Profession: But that all that know us, may have cause to Bless God for us; and we may Adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour in all things: To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all Honour and Glory, now and for ever. Amen.

F I N I S.

ADVERTISEMENTS

The *Act* of the *Common Council* of *Gloucester*, that necessitated the Publication of this Discourse, and was made the very next day after the Former part of it was Preached (and which, for *Substance*, is truly published in the *Observator*, that came out on *Wednesday, Sept. 5. 1683. Numb. 398.*) runs thus, as I am informed, *Verbatim* (but I won't be bound to make true Grammar on't) *Whereas Edward Fowler, Doctor of Divinity, and one of the Prebends of the Cathedral Church of this City, hath been frequently taken notice of, by the Mayor, Aldermen, Sheriffs and Common Council of this City, in his Sermons here, to Countenance Sedition and Faction, and to Preach those things, which tend to the disturbance of Well-affected men of this City: It is therefore Ordered by this House, That when, and as often, as he Preacheth at the Cathedral Church in this City, that the Mayor and Aldermen and Common Council of this City, shall not go thither with the Sword in their Formalities; but shall go to some other Church in this City; to hear some Loyal Orthodox Divine, and to be paid at the Charge of the City.*

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